Radheya - A Story from the Mahabharata

Act One

(Radheya enters. He is a warrior and carries a bow and a quiver full of arrows. There may be crowd sounds but they stop when Radheya takes center stage and addresses Arjuna, who is imagined.)

Radheya: Arjuna, this is Radheya. I have come to challenge you. You seem to be too conceited with the skill you have displayed. With my bow and arrow, I can hit the target as you have done and much more. I have come here to a tournament; not a private show arranged for your benefit. Do you accept my challenge or do you admit that I am a better archer?

Kripa: Before we go on, we must observe the rules for fighting a duel. It is a rule that only those who are equal in rank may fight one another. This Arjuna, one of the five Pandava brothers is the youngest son of Queen Kunti. He belongs to the royal house of the Kurus. You, young man, must now announce your father and the family to which you belong.

(Radheya slowly lowers his head in sadness and sits. The sun slowly sets and rises with accompanying music. As if in a dream, Kunti appears and faces the audience. She pantomimes that she is placing a baby in a box and setting the box in the river, watching it float away. Kunti leaves. Radheya awakes to the chanting of a brahmana, Indra in disguise.)

Indra: (offstage) I beg alms. I beg alms.

Radheya: What is that? What a powerful voice - not merely the voice of a good brahmana, but that of a noble gentleman.

(Indra enters)

Indra: Back off, clouds, and return with the sunset.
(to Radheya) I beg that you give me alms.

Radheya: I am very glad, holy man, that you have come into my presence. I am blessed. My salutations. I am Radheya, who has a love of archery but is reputed as a sutuputra

or one born of a lower class. I am not allowed to fight, but now I am fortunate that this head can now receive the dust from the feet of a great sage.

Indra: Radheya, eternal as the sun, the moon, the Himalayas and the ocean be your fame.

Radheya: Sage, shouldn't you wish me a long life? But then, yours is an auspicious wish. One who strives for virtue is likely to live long and when a warrior fixes his thoughts on protecting his people, he is destined for heaven. As king of the Angas, I hope to achieve that. What may I offer you, holy man?

Indra: I beg for your generous alms.

Radheya: I will give you some charity. Hear what I have in my possession. If it pleases you, then I can give you one thousand cows - young cows, each decorated with gold-tipped horns and each, even after satisfying their calves, supplying streams of milk.

Indra: I don't care for them.

Radheya: No? Then I will offer you a herd of elephants that appear like great hills! Their roar is deep like thunder.

Indra: I don't want them, either.

Radheya: You don't? Then consider this offer - I will give you huge mounds of gold!

Indra: Hmmmmmmm **(takes a few steps)** No! No! I don't want that!

Radheya: Then, I'll conquer the entire world and give you that!

Indra: What will I do with the Earth?

Radheya: Then I'll give you the burnt fruit of a fire sacrifice.

Indra: What will I do with burnt remnants?

Radheya: Then, take my head.

Indra: Ugh. Ugh!

Radheya: Don't be alarmed. Forgive me, holy man.

Indra: Would you consider giving your armor and your earrings?

Radheya: Your request is strange. These two articles cannot be easily removed from my body. They came with me at birth, but I will agree to give you other armor and earrings, which are more costly than these.

Indra: I have heard that you are the greatest of all givers. I don't want other earrings and armor. I want only those belonging to you.

Radheya: Sage, I see that you are attracted by the glow from these earrings. They are not ordinary ornaments. They have been placed there to protect me from death. I have sworn to Duryodhana, the mighty sovereign of the Kurus that I will kill the stalwart Arjuna in the war that is to be fought. For this reason, I must have the armor and the earrings.

Indra: (with exaggerated humility) I beg of you

Radheya: (laughs) My Lord, you can no longer conceal your identity. You are Indra. It is you who are the greatest of all givers. It is your privilege to grant boons to us mortals. I feel so embarassed when you ask a boon from me. Here (Radheya places the armor and earrings at Indra's feet) I am pleased hat the great Indra is accepting a gift from me. I am proud to give you my life.

Indra: (Amazed and revealing his true image.) You are right, I am Indra, a person like you. You are noble, now you may ask from me anything that you like.

Radheya: My Lord, to receive anything in return for a gift is not proper. The gestures of such giving loses its grace. But on the other hand, I will accept something in this case and I'll tell you why. In your affection for Arjuna and your partiality for his brothers, the Pandavas, you have performed an unfair act which will not be approved by anyone. To spare you the embarrassement, I ask for one boon - your shakti, the weapon with which you destroyed your enemies. It will, to a certain extent, compensate for the loss of the armor and earrings. I require your shakti to be used just once, against one person. I have just one enemy.

Indra: I know you mean Arjuna, but as long as he is protected by his friend, Krsna, no one can harm Arjuna. Not even my shakti can harm him.

Radheya: Still, I have some hope of conquering him.

Indra: Radheya, your conviction of purpose astounds me. Then here, take my shakti. (Indra hands Radheya his weapon). You wish to use it once, and it is a force which cannot be repeated.

Radheya: My Lord, I thank you (overjoyed, he falls at Indra's feet) Now, I have one more request. Today, I have found a friend in you. You seem to like me. If you do really care, will you grant me one thing?

Indra: Yes, Radheya.

Radheya: For the last so many years, I have been suffering so much because of my low birth. It has been shrouded in so much mystery. Can you reveal to me the secret of my birth? Tell me, who am I? Who is my father? Who is my mother?

Indra: I know the answers, and I wish I could tell you, but I am not to in a position to do so. In due course of time, you will know all of these things.

Act Two

(Radheya performs puja to the sun god, Surya. As he completes the worship, Krsna enters.)

Krsna: Radheya.

Radheya: Krsna.

Krsna: I see that you are very committed to your worship of Surya, the Sun.

Radheya: One must offer oblations showing gratitude. So many bounties are given to us. If I do not show some respects to Surya who gives everyone life, I would be a mere thief.

Krsna: Radheya, you have always been true to righteousness. You have mastered all the great books of wisdom, the Vedas. Radheya, you must be aware that there are three kinds of people in this world. The first class is made up of those who are righteous. The second class of people is those who have only their own profit in view. And there is a third type who enjoy doing what is wrong. I am afraid that Duryodhana, your companion, is of that class. Who will ever forget the time that Queen Draupadi was insulted? During the Kurus gambling match, she was mercilessly dragged before the elders and was then held as a wager in the assembly of so-called noblemen who are meant to protect women instead of abuse them? It was Duryodhana who was the instigator behind that ignoble act. He is becoming known the world over for his ill-doings. Those who share such company will also share the karma. Why then do you support the evil Duryodhana and fight for his cause?

Radheya: (smiling) You are right, my Lord. I am aware of Duryodhana's faults but I love him. I love him too much to judge him as others do. He has been a friend. The world has always questioned my valor because I am not pure-bred. I am a sutaputra, but Duryodhana never regarded mea as such. Once, in the city of Hastinapura, a tournament was going on I challenged Arjuna to fight, but I was not allowed to compete since I was a

sutaputra. It was Duryodhana who took up my side. He recognized my skill and made me the king of the district of Anga. We clasped hands to seal the transaction. I asked Duryodhana what I could do in return for his regal gesture "Nothing," he said. "I only want your heart." I have, indeed, given my heart to him as well as to my foster mother, Radha.

Krsna: (momentarily silent) Yes, the debt of gratitude is a most difficult one to repay.

Radheya: (like a child) Krsna, You are a great mystic, perhaps You could tell me about my past. Can you tell me about my birth? Who is my mother? Who is my father?

Krsna: I can tell you about these mysteries.

Radheya: Please. I am eager to know myself. Who am I?

Krsna: Some time ago, a young girl with beautiful manners attended to the needs of the sage Durvasa, famed throughout the world for his penance and austerities. The girl was a princess and she conducted herself admirably. Indeed, the sage was so pleased with her that he wanted to grant her a benediction. He summoned her to his presence and told her that he would teach he a certain incantation. If she recited it, any demigod whom she thought of would come to her. She received the gift with humility. Durvasa went away. She did not understand the full meaning and power of the incarnation, but she was as excited with it as a child with a new toy.

(Kunti enters and moves with Krsna's narration.) It was early in the morning - through the Eastern window, she could see the sun just rising. The sky was drenched in the color of liquid gold. The waters of the Ganges River which ran against the palace of her father were lapping against the walls. The combination of the sun and his soft beams, beams which had the coolness of the dawn, and the river with her path glowing with the red and gold of the sunrise, touched the heart of the child. She lost herself in the beauty of the scene. She thought about how wonderful it would be if the sun

could be there by her side. She happened to remember the incantation which the sage Durvasa had taught her. "Why," she thought, "If I recite the mantra, the person I think of will come to me. Yes, that it is the way Sage Durvasa had said it- 'will come to you.'" The child held her palms together, palms which looked like lotus buds, and invoked the sun with her incantation. A miracle was happening - along the path of the river, the sun's rays traveled quickly. She was blinded by a sudden brilliance and then the Sun God stood by her side. He stood looking at her with a smile of teasing amusement. She clapped her hands together in excitement and said:

Kunti: The sage Durvasa said that it would work! I stood looking at you rising in the East - you were so beautiful that I wanted you to come here. So, I recited the incantation and you're here! How wonderful!

Surya: Now that I have come, what do you want me to do?

Kunti: Why, nothing! I just thought of you and imagined how wonderful it would be if you were beside me and could be my friend, that's all.

Surya: O, but that is not all. It is evident that you did not know the meaning in the words when the sage taught you he incantation. He said that any demigod whom you invoked would come to you, is that not so?

Kunti: Yes.

Surya: Can you not see that it means that the god will embrace you and give you a son?

Kunti: (frightened) I did not know that! I had no idea that the words meant this! Please forgive my ignorance. Please go away now, save me from my shame.

Surya: That is impossible. The power of the incantation is that once I am summoned, I cannot go back until I take you. You cannot escape the benefit of the incantation you carelessly used.

Kunti: I am a young girl and unmarried. What will the world say if I were to suddenly be with child? What will my father say? It will break his heart.

Surya: Do not be so frightened. After the child is born, you will again become a virgin, as you are now. People will not know of this incident. Your son will become famous throughout the world. He will become most charitable. He will be a great archer. He will be born with armor and earrings. **(Surya exits.)**

Krsna: In due course of time, a child was born. The princess was too young to know the joy of motherhood; she was only concerned with the shame of it. She looked out the window and gazed upon the placid river. In her heart, a storm was brewing. Then, she made up her mind.
(She pantomimes the scene again.) Wrapping the child in a piece of silk, she placed him in a box afloat on the river and returned to her apartment. From her window, she saw the box floating further and further away from her. Tears flowed from her eyes. Lifting her hands in supplication to the Sun, she cried, "My Lord, I have done a great injustice to this child born of you and me. Please guard him. Please do not let any evil befall him."
(Kunti exits) For years, and even to this day, the girl can see one thing: a wooden box and a piece of silk. Wrapped in the silk, a beautiful child, with its armor and earrings gleaming in the light of the morning sun.

Radheya: (in tears) Krsna, do You mean to say that I was that abandoned child? Surya, whom I worship daily is my father?

Krsna: Yes.

Radheya: And my mother is a princess, now perhaps a queen?

Krsna: Yes.

Radheya: Then, I am not a sutaputra! I am a ksatriya, a warrior. Can this be true? You talk as though You know my mother. Krsna, do You know her? Is she alive? May I see

her?

Krsna: Your mother is the mother of five other sons - five heroes who have no equals in this entire world.

Radheya: (gasping) "Five sons!" "Five heroes that have no equals in this entire world!" No, no, surely You do not mean the Pandavas!?

Krsna: (softly) Yes, Radheya. They are the Pandavas. Kunti is your mother.

Radheya: Kunti, the mother of Arjuna?

Krsna: Yes. You are her eldest son. Your birth happened before she was married to Pandu, the father of your brothers.

Radheya: (goes to Krsna's feet. Krsna comforts him) O Krsna, indeed I am the most unfortunate of all living beings. To think that I have been known as a sutaputra to the world for all these years! How can I get used to knowing that the Pandavas are my brothers?
(He wipes tears from his eyes with his forearm.)
Krsna, my Lord, You must have known this truth for so many years - why was I not told? Why do you tell me all this now? I was very happy in my hatred of the Pandavas. Why? Why?

Krsna: (compassionately) I wanted to save you from certain death, Radheya. I wanted you to live. You know that a son born of a woman when she was a maiden becomes, by the law, the son of the man she marries. Accordingly, you are a Pandava. You are the eldest of the Pandavas. You are a Pandava on your father's side. You are a Vrsini, My cousin on your mother's side. Come with me, I am going to Yudhishira, the eldest brother. Your brothers will fall at your feet. All the kings who assembled to help the Pandavas will honor you as the eldest Pandava, so you will be crowned by them as their king. You will the king and Yudhisthira will be the next in line. He will lead the white horse of your chariot and lift you to your seat. The dark and beautiful Draupadi will belong to you. Yudhisthira will get into the chariot beside

you. The mighty Bhima will hold the umbrella over your head. Your younger brother, Arjuna, will be your charioteer - he will hold the reins of your horses. Nakula and Sahadeva and I will be walking behind your chariot. Your dark days are over, Radheya. Come with me, you will become king of the world. More than that, you will find five brothers and a mother who has been longing for you! Come. Come.

Radheya: Krsna, Your temptation is great. You dangle in front of me a name, great fame and a wealth of affection from six noble souls. But, you cannot tempt Radheya. I am very jealous of my current name and reputation. If I do not fight this promised duel with Arjuna, what is to become of me?

I will die for Duryodhana. That will be my glory. I cannot have affection for the Pandavas. But, I have been cursed by fate. The one pleasure which I have been looking forward to was this duel with Arjuna. In Your affection, You have now ruined my morale! Knowing that he is my younger brother, how can I fight with him? But, I must fight. Krsna, You knew that I would not abandon my friend, Duryodhana. Why then did You have to tell me the secret of my birth today? I wish I could be angry with You, yet I cannot be. I know that You are concerned about me - if You are really and genuinely interested in my welfare, will You do me just one favor?

Krsna: Certainly, I will do it.

Radheya: (taking the right hand of Krsna) Promise me that You will keep this a secret until my death.

Krsna: You have My word, but why do you want to keep this a secret?

Radheya: If the noble and righteous Yudhisthira knows that I am his brother, his elder brother, he will not accept the kingdom for himself, even if he wins it. But, that was not meant to be. My future is clear to me - I am sure of the fact that the Pandavas will win this war because they are protected by You, and I feel hat I will die on

the field of battle. Am I correct, Krsna, am I right? You are the Supreme Mystic, You must know.

(Krsna embraces Radheya, remains silent and exits.)

Act Three

(Radheya performs puja to Surya, then he addresses Surya.)

Radheya: O my Father, everyday when you reach the zenith, I worship you and when my worship is over, I wait for someone to ask me for alms. I grant them all that they may ask. I am sure that (Kunti enters with her face concealed) has earned me some piety and peace. I am happy to give. In a dream, you warned me not to give to the brahmana "That is Indra in disguise," you said - but, I disobeyed you. I am willing to give anybody my life. I have never loved this life of mine. I do not mind giving it away.

(Kunti waits behind him and Radheya turns around to see who is watching him.)

Radheya: Please sit down in the shade. **(He offers respects)** I am Radheya. What may I do for you? Please tell me what you want.

Krsna: (stares at Radheya for a while before she speaks - she is tearful) You may know me, or you may not. I have come for something.

Radheya: I do not know you; yet, I feel that I do know you. I feel as though I have known you all of my life. Your form, your tears, your sad voice - they all seem to be so very familiar. But, for the life of me, I cannot say when I have seen you. Excuse me.

(Radheya turns to take his arati paraphernalia and drops them.) Yes, yes, I know you! You are the woman that haunts me at night!

Kunti: What are you saying? I do not understand. I haunt you at night? I will sit and listen; I am not in a hurry. I have come to spend some time with you.

Radheya: It is very strange. I have never told anyone about this

woman who haunts me, except my mother, Radha. Still, looking at you, I want to tell you all about myself. I feel that you love me and understand my heart. My name is Radheya. My Mother's name is Radha. But then, she is not my mother. She did not give birth to me. My Father, Atiratha, found me floating on the river Ganga. My Father took me to his wife, Radha and made a gift of me to her. That is why I am called Radheya. But, I am wondering - whenever I went to sleep, I used to be disturbed by a dream. It would always be the same dream. I would see a woman, she would be dressed in costly robes, her face would be hidden by a veil. I would be lying down and she would bend over me. I would get up and ask her, "Who are you?" But, she would vanish like a startled ghost. As years passed, the woman would haunt me only once in a while. I think it was my mother who comes to me in my dreams.

Kunti: (She cannot look at him now) I am your mother. I am Kunti. You are my first born.

Radheya: Oh, am I awake or asleep? Perhaps I am dreaming again. **(They are in each other's arms.)** You have come. If only you know how much I have longed for this moment. Mother, my mother, why did you stay away from me for so long? Mother, let us just sit down and just be with each other. This happiness will not last long. I have the association of my father, Surya, daily, but not you, so I must take advantage of it now.

Kunti: How did you know who your father is?

Radheya: It doesn't matter. Please, tell me what it is that you have come here for.

Kunti: My child, you have been suffering many indignities for all these years. That was because the world did not know that you are the son of Surya and Kunti. It is not right that you should fight with your brothers. You must come with me, I will take you to the Pandavas. You can find happiness and peace in the company of Yudhisthira. Come with me and gladden my heart. This is the request I put to you. Come, my son.

Radheya: (pauses and contemplates) No, Mother, I cannot. I will stay by the side of Duryodhana. All these years, when you had no thoughts for your son, whom you abandoned to the river, Duryodhana has been my only friend. The stigma, sutaputra, has clung to me forever. You don't know how much I have suffered. Wherever I went, my name preceded me and I was no welcome.

Kunti: But now it will be known that you are not a sutaputra, but a ksatriya. I do not care what people will say, even about the injustice I have done to you. I am prepared to face the contemptuous eyes of the world. Please come to your brothers.

Radheya: Duryodhana is my brother. Depending on me and my hatred for Arjuna, Duryodhana has launched this great war. I will have to forget this visit of yours. (pauses) And Radha is my mother. She took me into her bosom with affection. Her breasts were full of milk when she took me in her arms. Forgive me for saying this, but that is where my natural affection ahas gone. If you want some alms from me, I'll promise you this. On the great battlefield of Kurushetra, I will not attempt to slay my bothers, with the exception of Arjuna - I must fight with him. But, I am doomed - Krsna has taken up the cause of Arjuna. The war which is to be fought on the field called Kurukshetra is a sacrifice. Krsna is the master of ceremonies and Arjuna is the star performer. The other brothers will all be puppets in Krsna's hands. Krsna will see that your five sons will be spared. I will have to forget this visit of yours. I must now go on with my duty, much as it displeases you to hear all this. Mother, please bless me that my name will live as long as the world of men exists.

(He falls at her feet. She blesses him. They embrace. The lights dim and Radheya departs for the battlefield.)

Radheya: Arjuna, son of the great Queen Kunti - I, Radheya, a sutaputra and son of Radha and Atiratha, challenge you to combat.

(Radheya draws numerous arrows and dodges those of Arjuna. He occasionally pantamimes that he is moving his chariot, then

suddenly his chariot becomes stuck in the mud. He gets off the chariot and attempts to raise the left wheel, while continuing to receive the onslaught of arrows.)

Arjuna, stop! My left chariot wheel is stuck. Do not release your arrows. Uphold military conduct. Stop. Let us deal in all fairness.

(Krsna appears. Radheya is frozen with His sudden interjection.)

Krsna, great Charioteer of Arjuna, please tell Arjuna to act righteously!

(He continues to struggle with the wheel.)

Krsna: Now you want fair treatment from Arjuna? Radheya, how were you fair when you watched Draupadi being dragged before the assembly of the Gambling Match? How were you fair during the throwing of dice by the cheat Sakuni? And, just four days back, you saw Arjuna's son, a mere boy, mercilessly slain by six big heroes, all allies of your principal cheat, Duryodhana. The boy wanted a fair chance. He did not have a single weapon. How can you speak of fairness? Radheya, you are by nature good, but your only fault is your long upheld company with Duryodhana. **(to Arjuna)** Shoot your arrow now.

(Krsna exits. Radheya is struck by an arrow and he dies. The lights go out, then brighten a little. Krsna enters with flowers and showers them over the body of Radheya.)